Life Lessons from the Holy Mother

Posted on December 1, 2022 by AA

— Swami Vireshananda —

The later part of the 19th century was the age of the Industrial Revolution. The 20th century was the age of technological advancement, while the 21st century is the age of Information technology and connectivity. It was presumed that the progress of society was natural and spontaneous with the development of science and technology. It was also argued that the living standards of human life would be spectacularly improved with their assistance. The wise men thought that the humans would slowly get rid of their animal propensities with the improvements in their materialistic conditions. Now in the third decade of the 21st century, we live amid unprecedented comforts, facilities, and luxuries unheard of even a decade back. However, poverty among the majority of people around the globe has not subsided. The conflicts in the name of race and nationalities have not been reduced. The world is gripped by the tension of economic uncertainty and fear of an impending global conflict. Individual lives are shattered by increasing greed, selfishness, work-related stress, and a hundred other disturbing psychological and social factors.

Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi serves as a beacon of light in these troubled times. Her enigmatic personality, immaculate

character, and simple yet wonderful life—provide lasting guidelines for peace, tranquillity, contentment, and happiness that men and women ignorantly seek in the madhouse of materialism, consumerism, and sensuality prevalent today. In Holy Mother, we find the eternal source of solace, comfort, motherly affection, and enduring bliss—the celestial traits which are wanting even in today's most prosperous nations.

A Rewarding Life

The primary lesson we learn from Holy Mother is her innovative perspective towards *life* itself. According to her, the world is but God's play and humans are pawns in His great game. Misery is an indispensable part of life, being the result of one's own actions. Holy Mother says: 'So, instead of blaming others for such sufferings, one should pray to the Lord and depending entirely on His grace, try to bear them patiently and with forbearance under all circumstances.'[1]

Most of us do not consider our life to be impermanent. Our achievements, accumulating pleasurable objects, along with the happiness and misery that constitute experience—are all fleeting. Death engulfs every one of our possessions, yet we strive hard to acquire them throughout our lives until death. Mother says: 'Such is life, here today, gone tomorrow! Nothing goes with one, except one's merit and demerit; good and evil deeds follow one even after death' (ibid., 4).

Holy Mother's life was by no means spectacular in the ordinary sense. She lived her earlier days in abject poverty and deprivation, and was humiliated and tormented in various ways by the people around her. Though the consort of a divine incarnation, she was subjected to untold miseries. However, she kept her flame of faith burning throughout her difficult times and held on to God even in adverse circumstances. She did not utter a single word of malice to anyone who caused her distress. The great resolve she exemplified in her life is reflected in her own words: 'One must be patient like the earth. What iniquities are being perpetrated on her! Yet she quietly endures them all. Man, too, should be like that!' (ibid., 5).

The fact that life is full of suffering should not make us pessimistic and despondent. The purpose of life is not pleasure, but—in the words of Swami Vivekananda—knowledge. When properly understood, griefs are a great gift from God—they are the symbols of His compassion. The Divine Mother has become the whole universe, which includes both good and evil. When our thoughts turn towards God, it is good; when they turn away from God, it is evil. Hence, one should live surrendering oneself to God. One must forbear everything, since all is due to one's previous karma. The effect of evil will be tapered when one takes the Name of God and thinks of Him.

This is the idea of *a rewarding life* that the Mother presents before the world. Her life itself, being the best illustration of her teachings, becomes a guiding light in the darkened path of our life.

A Dispassionate Attitude Towards Life

The attitude Holy Mother had throughout her life is that of *dispassion*. This is also the ideal of life taught by Sri Krishna in the Bhagavadgita (18.49): '*Asakta-buddhiḥ sarvatra*; one whose mind is not attached to anything.' Holy Mother, who suffered so much, was worshipped as a veritable goddess in her later days. However, she remained equipoised through all the circumstances and showed the world that the ideal practice of detachment is possible even when we are engaged in daily chores facing all the hardships of life.

Holy Mother calls this life '*a great game*' commenced by God Himself. This world is but an illusion that *Mahamaya* (the Divine Mother) has conjured up! She wonders: 'What one claims as his possession will be left behind at death. Still, men cannot understand this simple truth' (ibid., 17). The Mother also echoes the contention of Vedanta that it is the inborn desires that cause continuous series of births and deaths (*saṁsāra*). She says: 'As long as a man has desires, there is no end to his transmigration. It is the desire alone that makes him take one body after another' (ibid.). Hence, according to the Mother, the

best way is to surrender all desires to the will of God, and pray for devotion and detachment, because God's will is always meant to bring the best for us in our life.

Holy Mother says that the only desire one should develop is to become desireless, since desire is the root of all suffering. This body as well as this world—are all full of suffering. 'Happiness is only an empty word' (ibid., 21); the real joy lies in God. It is not a good idea to aspire for a human body for the sake of sense pleasures and worldly enjoyments, since the world is full of misery and pain. 'The body is never free from the attendant troubles' (ibid.). The diseases and suffering—both mental and physical—are but a tax one has to pay for having this body. The difference between an ordinary human and a great soul is that the former weeps while leaving the body and the latter laughs. Death is but a mere play.

Holy Mother enlightens us about the transitoriness and fragility of human relationships saying: 'Everything, husband, wife, or even the body, is only illusory. These are all shackles of illusion' (ibid., 22). Even the attachment to the body is an illusion. Why should one be so vain about the body? However beautiful or strong the body may be, it will be reduced to three pounds of ashes! The whole world is nothing but a dream.

We should develop detachment towards the world. The less we are attached to this world, the more we enjoy peace in the mind. Our attachment should always be with God, because, if one loves a human being ignorantly and selfishly, one will have to suffer for that. ‘He is blessed, indeed, who can love God alone. There is no suffering in loving God’ (ibid., 24).

Holy Mother always stresses performing one’s duties, but with a dispassionate attitude. She gives the essence of Karma Yoga succinctly: ‘Always do your duty to others, but the love you must give to God alone. Worldly love always brings in its wake untold misery’ (ibid., 24).

Mind Control and Practice of Meditation

The overwhelming digital pervasion in our life has resulted in constant flickering in our minds, leading to superfluous stress and anxiety of various sorts. This has persistently catastrophic consequences on the way we live, think, and act. It also deprives us of the serenity and everlasting bliss that the perusal of the spiritual path alone can induce in us. Hence, it is essential for us to have at least a rudimentary knowledge of the way our mind works and how to control it. In this context, the simple teachings of the Holy Mother surely are life-saving for us.

Holy Mother points out that everything depends upon one's mind; nothing can be achieved without purity of mind. It is the firm conviction in the Yoga-Vedanta tradition that real concentration cannot be attained without purity of mind. The grace of one's own mind is absolutely necessary even if one has the grace of one's Guru.

However, Holy Mother assures us not to worry, since restlessness is the *very* nature of the mind. The Name of God is more powerful than the senses. She says: 'Whenever the mind goes after anything other than God, consider that as transient and surrender the mind at the sacred feet of the Lord' (ibid., 28). It is the law of nature that the mind is sometimes dominated by good, and sometimes by bad tendencies. It is but natural for one to be worried about sinful tendencies in one's mind. However, the Mother removes such an inhibition: 'Don't be afraid. I tell you that in this Kali Yuga, mental sin is no sin. Free your mind from all worries on this account. You need not be afraid' (ibid., 31). Cultivating good company and trying to be good will in time lead to purification of mind, but prayer to God is essential. 'It is the very nature of the mind to go to lower things, to objects of enjoyment, but the grace of God can make the mind go towards higher objects' (ibid.).

Meditation is an effective practice to bring the mind under control and fix our mind towards God. It will be effected only

through the persistent and continuous repetition of the Name of God as prayerful remembrance. Hence, Holy Mother gives importance to Japa, which she says, is to be practised at all times, whether our mind is concentrated or not. She also says: 'It will be good for you if you can repeat the Name of God for a fixed number of times daily' (ibid., 43).

Repeating the Name of God with devotion will direct the mind towards God. If one sees God's form and becomes absorbed in Him, one's Japa stops. This is the process of meditation. As one goes on with Japa, one should also meditate on one's chosen deity. Even if the mind is not concentrated, one should not give up repeating the Name of God. Holy Mother says: 'You do your duty. While repeating the Name, the mind will get fixed of itself on the ideal, like a candle flame in a place protected from the wind' (ibid., 45).

The constant practice of meditation makes the mind one-pointed. Along with it, one should also practise discernment (*viveka*) between the real and unreal. One can also practise regulation of breathing (*prāṇāyāma*) a little to steady the mind. However, Holy Mother warns that one should not overdo it. She describes the benefit of meditation in her characteristic style: 'If a person is steady in meditation, he will clearly see the Lord in his heart and hear His voice. The

moment an idea flashes in his mind, it will at once be fulfilled and he will be bathed in peace' (ibid., 50).

Importance of Spiritual Practice

One must seriously engage in spiritual practice if one aspires for spiritual advancement. Sri Sarada Devi says curtly in this regard: 'The mind gets purified after hard Tapasya. Without regular practice, nothing can be attained' (ibid., 52). God is purity Itself and so, the realisation of God cannot be attained without austerities. Through a pure mind alone, one gets higher knowledge and spiritual awakening.

Holy Mother insists that the purpose of all spiritual practices is to keep the mind steady at the feet of God; to keep it immersed in His thought. The mind will become strong when one practises spiritual disciplines in a solitary place. Also, one should sit for meditation both in the morning and evening. Only through regular spiritual practice, can one hope for spiritual progress.

Holy Mother asserts that the aspirant should strive hard to realise God. She says: 'My child, you have been extremely fortunate in getting this human birth. Have intense devotion to God. One must work hard. Can one achieve anything without effort?' (ibid., 54).

The Same-sightedness with Love and Compassion

What modern society does lack is not material resources, but the ennobling human values that make life spiritually rich and fruitful. In the society today, discontent and frustration are hidden under the cosmetic garb of comfort and pleasure, ready to explode and torment our minds at any moment. The superficial solutions and adjustments in the way of living won't solve this problem. The only enduring solution is to develop a spiritual attitude and see all happenings in our mind and around us from that perspective.

Holy Mother's life and teachings help us to develop this all-important spiritual outlook of same-sightedness. She says: 'Learn to make the world your own. No one is a stranger, my child; the whole world is your own' (ibid., 93). These words echo the teaching of the Gita (15.8), which emphasises same-sightedness in all: '*Paṇḍitāḥ sama-darśinaḥ*; enlightened men are those who see the same (i.e. the Atman) in all.' Fault finding in others is a weakness in our mind that makes us restless and disturbed. Hence, Holy Mother suggests the best practice that leads to same-sightedness and peace of mind: 'I tell you one thing—if you want peace, do not find fault with others. Rather see your own faults' (ibid., 93).

How to practise same-sightedness? It can be achieved through the persistent and conscious practice of love and compassion towards all, without mental taints of selfishness and

possessiveness. Holy Mother teaches us how to develop this immaculate love that takes us to the heights of spiritual progress. Life should be lived very carefully. One should not use harsh words towards anyone and be responsible for one's suffering, for each action produces its own results. We should not make a habit of telling even unpleasant truths, let alone uttering harsh words towards others. Holy Mother cautions us: 'One's sensitivity is lost if one has no control over one's speech. And once a man casts all consideration for others to the winds, he stops at nothing' (ibid., 96).

One of the important life lessons that the Holy Mother teaches us is to love everyone equally, not demanding anything from those we love. She says: 'If you make demands, some will give more and some less. … Then your love will not be the same for all. You will not be able to love all impartially' (ibid., 97). True compassion is the offshoot of true and dispassionate love. In one instance, Mother asked a monk to show compassion even to a cat: 'Do not beat the cat. I dwell inside the cat too' (ibid., 98). One of our life missions, as per the Holy Mother, should be to work towards removing the sufferings of the world. She says, 'the purpose of one's life is fulfilled only when one is able to give joy to another' (ibid., 97).

Sri Ramakrishna—Embodiment of Spiritual Values

Holy Mother envisages Sri Ramakrishna to be the manifestation of all ennobling spiritual values in a human form. Hence, she asks her devotee-children to surrender and take refuge in the Master. ‘You will gain everything if you but take refuge in the Master. … The Master is everything—both *Guru* and *Ishta* (chosen deity). He is all in all’ (ibid., 128, 133). Sri Ramakrishna is the divine joy personified and he radiates unceasing bliss. Holy Mother would always see a smile on Master’s ecstatic face. People would be illumined by the Master’s words for he was the embodiment of Bliss itself.

Holy Mother also considers the constant repetition of the holy name of Sri Ramakrishna and thinking and meditating on him to be the highest spiritual practice. For her, ‘He is the Supreme Lord and the Supreme Goddess. He is the essence of all Mantras, the embodiment of all deities, and dwells in all creatures. One can worship all the gods and goddesses in and through him’ (ibid., 132–33). Holy Mother assures that one will never take a false step if one holds onto Sri Ramakrishna under all circumstances.

For one who is suffering in the world, Sri Ramakrishna is the source of compassion and consolation. Praying to the Master with an earnest and sincere heart is an effective medium to overcome the misery caused by the afflictions of mundane life. Holy Mother advises us: ‘Lay the burden of your mind before

Sri Ramakrishna. Tell him your sorrows with your tears. … Open your grief-stricken heart to him. Shed tears and sincerely pray, “O Lord, draw me towards you, give me peace of mind”. By doing so constantly you will gradually attain peace of mind’ (ibid., 139).

Conclusion

The life lessons we learn from Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi are not meant to fulfil the innumerable and meaningless desires that our minds are filled with—which make our life miserable and frustrating. In contrast, these teachings direct us on the noble path of spirituality and guide us through the vicissitudes and anxieties of our life. They give a higher meaning to all our actions and keep our minds on a higher plane untouched by the uncertainties and stressful conditions of empirical existence. In all, they make our life really blessed and prepare us to realise God even in this life. *It is the only royal way for all of us to become fitting children of Holy Mother, who is the embodiment of unbridled love and compassion towards the whole humanity!*

Reference

1. *Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother*, comp. Swami Vireshwarananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2009), 5.